

May 13, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran, Chairman
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester, Ranking Member
Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Takano, Chairman
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe, Ranking Member
House Veterans' Affairs Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Tester, Chairman Takano, and Ranking Member Roe:

We, the undersigned veteran and military service organizations representing a collective membership of millions, express our gratitude for all the work you and your colleagues have done to respond to the global threat of the COVID-19 virus. As your respective chambers consider the need for additional pandemic relief, we want to alert you to a serious condition impacting catastrophically disabled veterans who receive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)/Aid and Attendance (A&A) benefits.

VA provides funds through SMC/A&A for those veterans who require the regular aid of another person to complete activities of daily living such as eating, bathing, dressing and undressing, transferring, and toileting. These benefits help offset the costs of acquiring care, which is often provided in a veteran's home. SMC is an additional benefit provided to veterans with service-connected disabilities who meet certain disability requirements. In the case of veterans receiving VA pension benefits, A&A is provided when warranted in addition to the basic pension rate.

Shortly after the pandemic began, some veterans who receive home care services that allow them to remain in their homes were informed that they would need to pay more for these services because providers were experiencing higher costs due to the need to buy additional personal protective equipment like masks, gowns, and gloves to protect the home health workers and their veteran clients. In other cases, rates are higher due to shortages of providers or those who have succumbed to the virus forcing the veteran to obtain costly replacement care on short notice. Sadly, some veterans are forgoing needed home care because they are unable to meet those costs. Allowing this to continue is untenable for a group of veterans whose care should be VA's primary concern, particularly because in many cases they also represent those most vulnerable to the virus.

VA benefits like SMC/A&A help veterans remain living in their own homes where they are arguably safer during this pandemic. As a nation, we must do everything we can to help them stay safely in their homes and alleviate some of the burden of these increased costs. Because the needs of each veteran and the amount of financial support they receive from VA varies, a flat rate increase of these benefits is suggested to offset increased costs that are directly related to the ongoing pandemic.

We, the undersigned veteran and military service organizations, endorse the temporary 25 percent increase of SMC/A&A provided by section 80002 of H.R. 6800, the "HEROES Act," to ensure catastrophically disabled veterans can afford necessary care. We urge you to include this language in the final version of the next pandemic relief package.

cc: Speaker of the House;
Chairwoman and Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee

Respectfully,

Executive Director
Government & Veterans Affairs
The American Legion

Carl Blake
Executive Director
Paralyzed Veterans of America

EDWARD R. REESE, JR.
Executive Director
Washington Headquarters
Disabled American Veterans

Steve Schwab
Chief Executive Officer
Elizabeth Dole Foundation

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Jose Ramos
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Ken Greenberg
Director, Veterans & Military Policy
TREA: The Enlisted Association

Keith Reed
Executive Director
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Danielle Applegate, Vice President
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Christopher J. Slawinski
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Jon Ostrowski
Director of Government Affairs
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